

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Reading Partners

Application ID: 13AC145541

Program Name: Reading Partners Maryland

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The applicant has provided compelling and persuasive evidence that the percentage of 4th graders reading at grade-level standards has been stagnant and not comparable to their peers. Students from low-income communities are failing to meet grade-level standards for reading and failing to keep up with their peers. The applicant has stated that this is also true for students coming from minority communities. The applicant has provided clear evidence to support the statistics that have been provided. The applicant uses the results of a 2011 report from Baltimore's Annie E. Casey Foundation to support their findings and the need for the project.

(+) The applicant presents a succinct but compelling profile of the reading deficiency levels in 4th graders in its targeted community. The percentage of students that are not reading at grade level is cited in addition to data that compares the performance of minority students to their white counterparts.

(+) The applicant effectively develops its rationale to address the learning needs of children by citing a report that links low reading achievement with long-term academic struggles including dropping out of school.

(+) The applicant targets Baltimore students who are struggling readers. This population is also described as economically-disadvantaged.

(+) The applicant thoroughly describes the proposed coordinator roles of AmeriCorps members at different schools. For instance, activities Members will perform are discussed and may include recruitment, training, and management of literacy tutors and volunteers. Other duties such as developing individualized reading plans and other means for measuring student literacy development are also indicated.

(+) The applicant clearly describes Member roles and responsibilities by providing specific examples of job duties. Slot types clearly align with the applicant's program design.

(+) The applicant provides evidence to support the use of AmeriCorps members to recruit, train and manage community volunteers through explanation of past success utilizing this program model. AmeriCorps members are

able to serve many more students and empower their community by engaging volunteers with their tutoring model.

(+) The applicant provides adequate evidence-based and evidence-informed program design that supports their community driven model of one-to-one tutoring programs as a cost-effective and outcomes-successful way of improving student achievement.

(+) The applicant provides a comprehensive summary of their evaluation methods and internal data collection cycle including a literacy assessment of each enrolled student to determine baseline literacy skills and growth; twice annual tutor, teacher and principal surveys; collection of school-administered performance data and qualitative notes from tutors on students' real-time breakthroughs and challenges.

(+) By the end of the three-year grant cycle the project intends to see a significant increase in student attendance; each student will have an Individualized Reading Plan. The project will help the children become lifelong readers by empowering community volunteers to provide individualized instruction that produces measurable results. Results of the effort will show and demonstrate that 65% of students who receive the full dosage of tutoring will increase at least one full grade level in literacy skills.

(+) The Performance Targets chosen by the applicant were selected based on an internal trend analyses on assessment data collected over the last five years. The strategy of having consistently strong outcomes, selection of participating students and Performance Measure based on the Education National Performance Measure requirements has provided strong Performance Targets for the project.

(-) While the applicant references low-income communities, the applicant does not provide adequate data on the actual poverty rates in its targeted region nor how this compares to national poverty rates.

(-) The applicant does not consistently describe the grade level it intends to target. The applicant states grade level K-5 in one area of the narrative and grade 2-5 in another.

(-) The applicant lacks a clear description of the target community that the program will focus on, except to state they will serve in Title 1 elementary schools. There is minimal data regarding the specific elementary schools and the students served by the program.

(-) The applicant provides minimal explanation as to why they selected this population to serve or the rationale for the elementary schools they propose to serve with this program. The applicant provides minimal evidence for the need for services to address literacy rates within the selected school sites.

(-) The applicant provides limited information on what the organization will accomplish through the AmeriCorps program that it would not otherwise accomplish through existing staff and/or volunteers.